

## Leadership in organisational change: A post-structuralist research agenda

Journal:	<i>Organization</i>
Manuscript ID	ORG-16-0131.R3
Manuscript Type:	Article
Keywords:	Leadership, Organisational change, Discourse theory, Empty signifier, Floating signifier
Abstract:	<p>The organisational change literature remains dominated by macro and micro explanatory models which tend to exclude conflict, mess and power in favour of enumerating universalistic steps or, as is the subject of this paper, leadership definitions and factors for successful change. In this paper, I review and question some of the mainstream literature on leadership in organisational change, drawing on Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) political discourse theory and its mobilisation by critical leadership studies of organisational change. This paper problematises change leadership as a set of multiple and changing practices, pragmatically deployed by organisational players. In exploring those avenues, I deploy a five-step 'logics of critical explanation' approach – specifically designed by Laclauian discourse theorists – characterising organisational change practices according to social (rules and norms), political (inclusions and exclusions), and fantasmatic (fears and hopes) logics (Glynos &amp; Howarth 2007). Rather than a set of factors or top-down causes and effects, I offer a situated and critical explanation of leadership in organisational change. This research contributes to critical explanations of organisational change politics by considering leadership as a set of changing discursive practices and by developing four situated dimensions of leadership, which build on concepts of empty and floating signifiers, to add to discussions of the role of individuals in organisational politics.</p>

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

Introduction

The organisational change literature remains dominated by macro and micro explanatory models which tend to exclude conflict, mess and power in favour of enumerating universalistic steps or, as is the subject of this paper, leadership definitions and factors for successful change. Taking an organisational change study focus, I problematise this *status quo*, drawing on Laclau and Mouffe’s (1985) discourse theory and its mobilisation by some critical leadership studies (CLS) (Alvesson & Spicer 2012; Harding 2005; Kelly 2014). In beginning to critically understand leadership in organisational change, I deploy a five-step ‘logics of critical explanation’ approach (Glynos & Howarth 2007), which helps characterise the accepted norms and rules of leadership in a given organisation (social logics), its inclusions and exclusions of demands (political logics), and the hopes and fears gripped by such a concept (fantasmatic logics) in a given case. This paper articulates data collected from a nine-month case study of an English local strategic partnership (LSP) formulating a project of commissioning and integration to deal with Government austerity. Based on a four-decade long genealogy of this locality, four situated dimensions of leadership are proposed to better understand the practices linked to leadership and leaders in this specific locality. In sum, I argue that leadership can be represented as a set of multiple and changing practices, pragmatically deployed by organisational subjects to re/draw alliances and, ultimately, exercise power.

The paper is organised as follows. The first section highlights the lack of critique, complexity and politics of a majority of the leadership literature, leading to considering CLS and its emphasis on complexity and conflicts as constitutive of leadership. The second section outlines the paper’s discursive approach to leadership, emphasising how situated dimensions of leadership can add to this literature by helping to account for the complexity and conflictual aspects of leadership in organisational change. This is demonstrated in the third section which mobilises data collected from the case study. This leads to concluding remarks and proposals for future leadership research.

### Leadership in organisational change: a vast literature and a growing critical agenda

From the 1980s, the literature on organisational change (OC) leadership is dominated by performative models advising on where leadership can be found and distilling how it leads to successful change (Bass 1985; Kotter 1988; Kuipers et al. 2014 for a review). Yet, leadership in organisations continues to remain elusive, Rost (1993) claiming that two thirds of organisational leadership studies do not actually define leadership. Furthermore, few papers – 27 for the period 1990-2010 – deal empirically with leadership in organisational change (Ford & Ford 2012, p.3). To the point where leadership has become ‘slippery’ and “understood as nearly anything” (Spicer & Alvesson 2011, pp.194–195). Significantly for this paper, understandings of leadership tend to remain dominated by tales of heroic individuals endowed with the likes of charisma and transactional skills (e.g. Herold et al. 2008; Yukl 1994 for a critique). Issues of power, conflict and mess are also often side-lined by this dominant literature (Kuipers et al. 2014, p.2; 33).

To address these limitations, as I suggest above, a growing group of studies, sometimes known as ‘critical leadership studies’ (CLS), has emphasised the meaning, complexity and relational dimensions of organisational leadership (Alvesson & Spicer 2012; Collinson 2012; Driver 2012; Harding 2005). These studies find their roots in critical management studies (CMS), an eclectic school examining organisational and management issues (Parker 2014) and mobilising, among others, discursive approaches such as Laclauian ones to analyse conflicts, the ambiguity of organisational change projects and the manufacturing of consent (Bridgman & Willmott 2006; Parker & Dent 1996; Spicer et al. 2009). Focusing on identity construction, Collinson argues for instance that the constitution and practices of leadership, including during OC moments, involve complex identity work, interactions and negotiations with ‘followers’ (2006, p.185; see also Gleeson & Shain 2003; Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien 2012). Often in these studies, leadership is also understood as messy and relational. The building of informal coalitions of

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

change leaders (Rodgers 2006) or the identification and reconciliation of paradoxes created by the multiple realities of organisational change (Kan & Parry 2004) are thus foregrounded in critical explanations of organisational change. Such explanations also emphasise the political, ideological (Harding 2005; Dellagnelo et al. 2014; Sinclair 2007; Western 2008) and discursive aspects of organisational leadership (Alvesson & Sveningsson 2012), demonstrating the need for de-essentialising the ontological definition of leadership (Grint 2005). Levy and Scully (2007) have, for their part, deployed a poststructuralist reading of Gramsci’s concept of power as hegemony, arguing that individuals in organisations may “serve [...] as a contemporary Modern Prince, a political agent who transforms systems through skilful analysis, building organizational capacity, the development of smart strategy, and effective leadership” (cited in Levy et al. 2009, p.2). Here again, rather than a dialectical understanding, leadership is understood as implying the diverse drawing of consent by the deployment of strategies by ‘Modern Princes’.

These studies ultimately highlight the partial and changing definitions and practices of leadership (Gemmill & Oakley 1992), opening up the possibility for alternatives. Thus, they have sought to challenge the role of conflict in formulating and implementing organisational change, seeing struggle not as a ‘barrier’, as is often the case in mainstream accounts, but as the highlighting of alternatives (Knights & Murray 1994; see also Alvesson & Sveningsson 2003; Collinson 2011). They have even begun to problematise the ‘heroic leader’ (Alvesson & Spicer 2012; Collinson 2011; Fairhurst 2010; Harding 2014; van Knippenberg & Hogg 2003), suggesting that “leadership can exist without leaders” (Sutherland et al. 2014, p.764), and interrogating how leaders come to occupy a symbolic role in organisations and change (Ford 2006). Such perspectives delve into what appeals to ‘followers’ within change discourses, analysing how individuals are brought into hoping for the leader’s ‘vision’ to become true, that s/he will protect the organisation against threats, or that they will themselves develop ‘leadership’ practices. Indeed, Calás and Smircich (1991) stress the emotional aspect of leadership in convincing, changing, and

charming their 'followers' whilst Kelly (2014) explains how leadership represents "a space of absent presence" serving "to create the conditions of possibility for many competing and complementary definitions, meanings and interpretations" (2014, pp.905–906). Thus leadership "must always be described and represented by somebody or something else" (ibid., p.906).

### Critically conceptualising leadership in organisational change research: a post-structural discursive agenda

Rather than seeking to 'discover' and teach how 'effective' leadership results in 'successful' organisational change (OC) – as most of the literature continues to endeavour –, CLS have problematised this relationship, interrogating how and why leadership is constituted, articulated and contested in OC discourses (Gagnon & Collinson 2014; Sinclair 2007; Tourish et al. 2010; Western 2008). I argue however that these critical studies have some limitations which could be remedied via discourse theory. For example, some remain confined in their analysis to given categories of leadership, focusing for instance on the study of leaders as actors, or leadership discourse as communicative interaction (e.g. Tourish 2014). This is problematic because these remarks suppose that general typologies or definitions of leadership can be applied across different empirical cases. Others also under-explore identity processes concomitant with leadership practices (Gagnon & Collinson 2014, p.646). In addition, they sometimes reproduce similar performative goals to the mainstream leadership literature, such as how "[p]ost-structuralist theory offers a way of thinking that may be hugely insightful for people who are exploring how to become leaders" (Ford et al. 2008, p.3; see also Ford & Harding 2007). Finally, they limit their critique to the literature rather than empirical cases and "lived experiences" (Wilson 2013, p.111; Kelly 2014). This section formulates a twofold proposal for furthering critical understandings of leadership. First, I frame leadership as a changing and situated set of discursive practices and, secondly, articulating discursive concepts of empty signifier, floating signifier, subjectivity and agency, I propose four

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

dimensions of leadership practices which could add a layer in critically explaining organisational change in a given context.

*Organisational change leadership as situated and changing discursive practices*

I have already argued in the introduction that *why* and *how* questions of leadership in organisational change draw our focus to the political/hegemonic and ideological dimensions of leadership (Fairhurst 2011, p.503). Furthermore, leadership in organisational change should be analysed as contextually and historically constituted (Collinson 2014; Kelly 2014). What constitutes leadership in one organisation or for one change project, may not be discernible in another organisation, definitions and practices varying across time and space. For instance, in their review, Ford and Ford conclude that the literature on change leadership is problematic notably due to its “single-point data collection [...] [missing out on] the temporality of change” (2012, p.32). Thus the focus should be on analysing organisational change leadership via in-depth case studies of particular organisations over time (e.g. Fairhurst 2007), something which discourse theory combined with a logics approach can help to achieve in a critical way as I plan to illustrate. Other studies have further demonstrated this historical and contextual dimension by focusing on the emergence of particular practices (e.g. Heracleous & Barrett 2001). Denis et al. (2010) for instance draw on five case studies of change in healthcare organisations, conducted over eight years, to understand the dynamics of what they call collective leadership. For them, healthcare organisations are “inherently pluralistic” spaces crisscrossed by different objectives, actors, values and ambiguous power relations, requiring detailed analyses. These authors conclude that change leadership is “a dynamic phenomenon in which participants, roles and influences evolve over time” (2010, p.810). In their analysis of two leadership development programmes, Gagnon and Collinson document how such training opportunities saw senior managers “creat[e] their own alternatives” of what leadership means (2014, p.661), attaching

leadership to demands as varied as exclusiveness, specialness, obedience, and networking (2014, p.662; see also Alvesson & Spicer 2012; Kelly 2014; Tourish 2014, p.81; Wilson 2013, p.5).

This recognition of the plurality and contextuality of leadership points to the dangers of conceptualising leadership as a single ‘thing’ or definitive set of practices. Leadership could instead be framed as linking together multiple demands. Such a formulation offers the possibility of apprehending the multiple aspects of leadership practices in cases of organisational change. Importantly, this could help draw attention to how leadership is being articulated to exclude particular demands or document the practices of redefinition and thus contestation mobilised by chosen ‘leaders’. For instance, how is leadership articulated as a demand by change discourses? Are organisational subjects offered the possibility of becoming ‘change leaders’? How do these practices allow linking disparate demands for change? Was leadership synonymous with management, performance, collaboration or empowerment, a particular individual? These are some of the questions I will grapple with in the case study section.

Before I develop in the next section the four dimensions of leadership practices as retroductively informed by the case study, it is important to discuss briefly how this framework may be used as a bridge between micro and macro analyses of phenomena such as leadership or austerity. Recasting the ‘organisation’ and ‘organisational change’ as discursively constituted allows departing from the widespread understanding, especially in local government, of change being the result of ‘bigger’ phenomena such as neo-liberalism or austerity. In contrast to this mainstream interpretation, the organisation itself can be better understood as a site or multiple sites crisscrossed by multiple demands, in which ‘macro’ or ‘micro’ levels of change give way to a flat ontology (Marston et al. 2015; Schatzki 2005) and to the understanding of the organisation as always open to competing articulations and always-already lacking or dislocated. Change thus becomes the result of situated and competing articulations of disparate demands (e.g. neo-liberalism and austerity) as threats or/and opportunities requiring the

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

formulation and implementation of preferred practices or change ‘solutions’ (cf. Author, 2014 for more details).

*A Laclauian discursive agenda for critical leadership research*

This paper draws on discourse theory as developed by Laclau and the Essex School of discourse (Howarth 2000; Howarth et al. 2000; Laclau 1990; Laclau & Mouffe 1985) to frame organisations, leadership and change as discursively, historically and contextually constituted practices, rather than ‘facts’ or ‘real’ and permanent entities. According to (post)structuralist discourse theory, meaning, including ‘leadership’, is understood as the result of struggles between competing discourses seeking to hegemonise a given social order, e.g. an organisation (Bridgman & Willmott 2006; Contu & Willmott 2005). The organisation can hence be reframed as a set of politically constituted and dislocated spaces, where different hegemonic strategies are deployed by strategically placed individuals to continuously re-define consent and alliances (Howarth 2013; Laclau & Mouffe 1985). I want to examine how power draws frontiers within organisations, specifically via practices of inclusion and exclusion (known as logics of equivalence and difference in discourse theory (Laclau & Mouffe 1985, p.134)) which leadership is often a case of. Another key Laclauian concept here is that of demands. Demands are at first requests (Laclau 2006, p.655); for instance, an individual in an organisation may have a *grievance* or claim relating to her/his lack of participation in the decision-making of the organisation. Different grievances may emerge across an organisation, relating for example to a lack of control, a desire for more training or increased pay. Laclau argues that these disparate requests become demands when articulated together by discourses via inclusion and exclusion, or logics of equivalence and difference (Laclau & Mouffe 1985, p.134). Thus, demands for better pay, greater decision-making power and training may become linked together by a project/discourse as united against a common ‘enemy’. Finally, articulation accounts for the construction of meaning by the linking together of demands via these two logics whereby



1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9 meaning becomes stabilised (to a point) thanks to some demands becoming sedimented around  
10 privileged/central demands (Laclau & Mouffe 1985, p.105).

11  
12 Two Laclauian concepts present particular advantages for the analysis of popular but contested demands  
13 articulated by discourses: empty and floating signifiers. In cases of OC, where meaning in the  
14 organisation is being renegotiated, considering particular demands as empty or floating signifiers offers  
15 the possibility of critically explaining how and why such relations are being modified, concentrating  
16 notably on the power plays and beliefs surrounding the definition of those signifiers. Floating signifiers  
17 are signifiers which continue to see their meaning shift across context and perspectives, for instance  
18 'corporate culture' (Angouri & Glynos 2009, pp.11–12). Empty signifiers, for their part, are demands  
19 which become 'emptied' in order to symbolise a multiplicity of contradictory demands. In relation to  
20 organisational leadership, the concept of empty signifier has already been deployed. For instance, Ford et  
21 al. (2008, p.10) argue that "leadership, it would appear, is an 'empty signifier'", suggesting that  
22 leadership "has a politically significant performative effect, [...] [as] an object whose existence is  
23 impossible but which is central to that discourse of which it is a part" (2008, p.11). Ford and colleagues  
24 offer little explanation of the conditions of possibility for leadership to act as an empty signifier in  
25 specific organisational contexts. Instead, leadership is given an *a priori* status of empty signifier because  
26 of the diversity of meanings usually attached to it. Instead, this empty character should be dependent on  
27 multiple articulations, context, history or ideology (Howarth & Griggs 2006). In her analysis of the  
28 NHS's management, Harding also applies discourse theory to understand and critique "how managers  
29 'make' organisations and at the same time make their managerial selves" (2005, p.264). In doing so, she  
30 argues that management functioned as an empty signifier in the NHS discourse, management being  
31 simultaneously absent but present. Harding argues that such empty signifiers are necessary to represent  
32 everything that is impossible to realise in an organisation, such as collaboration or patient care.  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

Emphasising how leadership as an empty signifier ‘embodies’ an organisation’s discourse of change, Alvesson and Spicer (2012) develop a more relational and conflictual understanding of leadership where organisational struggles enable ‘the manager’ to continue redeploying her/his symbolic position, and thus allow other organisational subjects to continue reworking their own identities. In his paper, Kelly argues in favour of:

“studying the ideological character of leadership in language, while also paying attention to the myriad ways in which subjects and objects of language and action come to ‘stand in’ for, and temporarily fill, the empty centre of this seductive and endlessly adaptable signifier” (2014, p.607).

Like Ford et al. (2008) and Alvesson and Spicer (2012), Kelly understands leadership as a ‘given’ empty signifier, with its “seductive and endlessly adaptable” qualities. He stresses the need to understand how discursive practices such as ‘subjects’ and ‘objects’ come to ‘stand in’ for and fill the signifier ‘leadership’ in a given organisation. Similarly, Angouri and Glynos analyse ‘corporate culture’ as a floating signifier, foregrounding “the political dimension of organisational practice” and “suggesting that how this is fixed can only be determined through analysis of the practices under scrutiny” (2009, p.4; 10). Although not focused on leadership *per se*, this study is key in emphasising the situated dimension of empty and floating signifiers, requiring to analyse the practices at play.

A final advantage of discourse theory for analysing leadership is that it reworks the role of the individual in a number of ways (Glynos & Howarth 2007; Laclau 1996). What matters for this paper is that individuals are usually seen as satisfied with occupying pre-given subject positions (e.g. the dutiful employee, the ‘collaborator’). Here, discourses appeal to individuals, winning over their consent by offering subject positions that fulfil the individual’s longing for full identity (Stavarakakis 2008; Cederstrom & Spicer 2013). This affective dimension is key to understanding OC politics and how leadership practices appeal, or ‘grip’, individuals (Glynos & Howarth 2007). Furthermore, when a

discourse becomes threatened – dislocated –, individuals may constitute their own subject positions by identifying with new demands outside of given discourses.

What is still needed in organisational research are detailed cases of how and why leadership comes to operate as an empty or floating signifier for given organisational discourses. This is what I tackle now.

#### *Four dimensions of leadership*

In understanding how leadership is articulated in certain organisational change discourses, four dimensions of practices are here proposed. Rather than applicable to any case, these dimensions are outlined as hypothetical explanatory solutions to specific cases. Indeed, based on the retroductive framework of this article (cf. next section), theoretical issues that emerge during the research process may be resolved by iteratively articulating particular concepts, such as empty and floating signifiers, in addressing issues such as the role of individuals in change discourses or the mobilisation of particular demands, such as leadership, as empty/universal ones. Despite these four leadership dimensions being a contribution of the article, I have chosen to introduce them now rather than in the ‘findings’ section following the retroductive argument mentioned above where hypothesis and explanation are not clearly separable, both involving the same form of judgment by the analyst.

These four dimensions are: (1) leadership as a demand tendentially emptied of meaning allowing to link together a multiplicity of contradictory demands across spaces; (2) leadership as a subject position emptied of meaning to symbolically represent a given organisational discourse; (3) leadership as a contested and thus floating demand, implying struggles and strategies to gather consent; and (4) leadership as the practices of agency deployed in dislocatory contexts by individuals identifying with new and different demands to maintain the hegemony of a given discourse. These dimensions are now examined successively.

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

First, any consideration of leadership in organisational change has to examine which demands become linked to this signifier in a given organisational discourse. This requires documenting how leadership was mobilised (or not) to build a wide chain of equivalence and emphasise multiple possibilities. By (tendentially) emptying leadership of specific meaning, this signifier may become synonymous with demands as diverse as cooperation, performance, excellence, or organisational pride (Gagnon & Collinson 2014; Harding 2005; 2014; Spicer & Alvesson 2011). Such an analysis should investigate the diverse and contradictory demands assembled under the guise of leadership and ‘taught’ during widespread leadership training programmes, and how/whether such demands grip the senior managers and other stakeholders. In doing so, the question of the role of key individuals in linking particular demands together across hegemonically-defined spaces is brought to the fore, exploring the strategies (e.g. training or specialised groups) deployed to grip demands around leadership.

Second, some individuals may come to occupy subject positions of ‘leaders’ within a given organisational discourse – individuals occupying subject positions is one of the two aspects of identity in discourse theory (Laclau 1996)–, this/these individual/s ‘standing in’ for or symbolically representing that organisational discourse across contested and hegemonically-defined spaces. Thus if leadership has become synonymous with demands of collaboration, excellence and organisational pride (as hypothesised in the first dimension), an individual as ‘leader’ may also come to represent/embody those diverse demands. Until recently, analyses of identity and the role of individuals in organisations tended to focus either on the institutional structures and ‘positions’ made available to individuals in particular institutions, or on the behaviours, personal skills and voluntary character of identification. These approaches however underestimate the political and affective dimensions of organisational discourses, in which some individuals come to occupy certain positions in rendering such discourses hegemonic. Thus, understanding organisational change politics requires analysing the role that can be played by some individuals as empty signifiers, standing in as the signifier of a discourse. Indeed, for Laclau, “the very

notion of 'individual' does not make sense" (Laclau 2005, p.34), any discursive element being the result of "differential struggle [...] [all] equally capable of expressing, beyond their differential identity, the absent fullness of the community [...] none [being] predetermined *per se* to fulfil this role" (Laclau 1996, p.42). Laclau argues for instance that in 1960s and 1970s Argentina, Perón was "very careful not to take any definitive stand in the factional struggles within Perónism" and found himself "in ideal conditions to become the 'empty signifier' incarnating the moment of universality in the chain of equivalences which unified the popular camp" (1996, p.55). Individuals as empty signifiers could thus produce a dynamic understanding of the role of individuals in discourses of organisational change.

Third, following the framing of conditions as dislocations, 'leadership' may also become the object of struggle, organisational subjects fighting over which practices should be synonymous with leadership and emphasising the changing possibilities associated with this demand. In such cases, especially frequent during organisational change formulation, framing leadership as a floating signifier could help analyse the negotiation and contestation of meaning. Building on previous critical research of the NHS's management, Harding for example stresses "the complex manner by which NHS managers both absorb and resist, define and redefine, the identity of manager" (2005, p.269). In the same way that "[t]he manager responsible for the management of health services is thus a manager who strives to become an unattainable other, the rational manager", such a framing of leadership can lead to complex and critical discussions of the constant emptying and floating of such signifier, striving to represent demands as diverse as cooperation, performance and empowerment. Returning to Gagnon and Collinson's (2014) study of leadership training programmes 'feeding' multiple demands of what leadership ought to be, one can imagine how organisational reform occasions those designated 'leaders' or 'change leaders' to contest the meaning of leadership. Such political battles cannot be divorced from the appeal of fantasies of leadership often mobilised in organisations. Driver for instance uses psychoanalysis to "understand the continued mystery and romance of leadership", exploring "how leaders construct identities by drawing on

existing leadership discourses [...] [and] how fantasies are constructed but also, importantly, how they fail and reiterate fundamental lack” (Driver 2012, p.408).

Fourth, organisational discourses may become contested or dislocated, bringing those individuals standing in as the universal signifier of that given discourse (if this is the case, as described in the second dimension) to renegotiate the meaning of their subject position and hence of the organisational discourse as a whole. This fourth dimension relates to agency and the active identification process demonstrated by some individuals in some contexts. Indeed, if this subject position of ‘leader’ and the discourse it represents aim to continue mobilising a vast array of demands, and thus addressing grievances in a context of dislocation (i.e. necessary conditions for hegemony), it must sometimes renegotiate the particular demands it has become associated with. For example, these individuals as ‘leaders’ may in these cases strive to identify with different and novel demands (e.g. collaboration instead of performance management), re-articulating the meaning of their subject position of ‘leader’ and thus their own identity. In cases where the change project *stricto sensu* may not be implemented, organisational change as a discourse may still be considered a ‘success’ because of the ability of a given ‘leader’ to identify with new/different demands and thus allow a given organisational discourse to transform itself and remain hegemonic. In other words, this fourth leadership dimension may be crucial in understanding and distinguishing between the ‘failure’ of particular organisational change projects and the continued ‘success’ of organisational change discourses/regimes of practices (which is a key question in the case study).

This framing of leadership along lines of discourse theory emphasises the contradictory and disputed leadership practices in organisational change discourses, as illustrated by the four dimensions developed. To summarise, the first dimension of leadership offers the opportunity of discussing the drawing of equivalences between disparate demands occasioned by leadership being articulated as an empty signifier. The second dimension relates to the subject position of ‘leader’, which may be tendentially emptied of

meaning to symbolically embody a given discourse and thus exercise power. The third dimension relates to the contestation of leadership, where the meaning of this latter is dislocated and subject to struggles, individuals striving to link leadership to contradictory demands to fulfil their individual identity lack. The fourth dimension finally allows understanding how individuals when standing in as the universal signifier of an organisational discourse may come to renegotiate the meaning of their position in dislocatory contexts, identifying with new or different demands to redeploy a given organisational discourse. This four-dimensional approach adds to CLS by offering extra ways of examining leadership practices from a non-deterministic, political and situated perspective.

### Exploring discursive practices of leadership via a logics of critical explanation approach

In recent years, logics of critical explanation were formulated by poststructural researchers as a five-step methodology to help apply discourse theory to the empirical world (Glynos & Howarth 2007). Here, I mobilise it to examine leadership practices, leading to the formulation of four leadership dimensions.

A logics approach helps analyse “different dimensions of social reality” (2007, p.14) and thus different types of ‘rules’ governing a given system of meaning, such as higher education (ibid.), airport expansion (Griggs & Howarth, 2013) or UK banking (Glynos, et al., 2012). Thus this approach analyses all norms, actions, identities and other discursive practices – notably leadership ones – mobilised by competing projects in exercising power over a given context, not limiting itself to ‘talk and text’.

A first step *problematizes* the phenomenon under study. This implies a longitudinal approach, implementing Foucault’s genealogy, to explore the ‘ignoble origins’ of given discourses, allowing to understand how consent is forged over time and interrogating the “reproduction and transformation of hegemonic orders and practices” (Howarth, 2000, pp. 72-73; Glynos & Howarth, 2007). For instance, in this paper, how was leadership formulated and became linked – or made equivalent – to changing demands over the decades to build consent? A second step of a logics approach (these steps are not

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

successive but interlocking) consists of rendering the problematised phenomenon more intelligible, what Glynos and Howarth term “retroductive explanation” (2007, p.19). *Retroduction* was traditionally linked to the domain of discovery, implying “the generation or positing of hypotheses”, rather than explanation (2007, p.27). In this study, this step allows via iteratively articulating concepts of empty and floating signifiers, identity and discourse to make sense of leadership in the case study. Thirdly, three types of *logics* are “indispensable in helping us to explain, criticise and evaluate” problematised phenomena (Howarth, 2008). In a case of organisational change, contextualising interviews with social, political and fantasmatic logics allows investigating how a given reform project emerged, mobilised consent and became slowly embedded or failed. Social logics interrogate what are considered to be the rules and norms governing social practices in a given case. Political logics allow characterising how demands – identities, actions, beliefs, policies or other discursive practices – are brought in or excluded by an organisational change project. Finally, fantasmatic logics identify the affective dimension of leadership/change discourses, examining how demands, and particularly individuals’ identities, become ‘gripped’ by particular discursive practices. The fourth step of a logics approach involves *articulation*. This is a fundamental methodological ‘tool’ in explaining and critiquing problematised phenomena. It also implies that theoretical concepts (the ontological) and objects of study (the empirical) cannot be considered as immune from each other. Instead, both are modified by the intervention of the researcher, as done here with leadership. Fifthly, by making visible the moments of contestation, domination and excluded possibilities (i.e. the political and fantasmatic dimensions of social reality), this analytical framework opens up the space for a *critique* of leadership and change practices in a given context. Unlike conceptual frameworks based on pre-given categories of evaluation such as rationality or interest maximisation, a discursive and logics framework sees its normative ‘bedrock’ being constituted *in situ*, according to the context and practices under study.



### Case study

This paper critically explores leadership practices in an English County Council, anonymised as ‘Internshire County Council’, and its Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), anonymised as ‘Internshire Together’. Internshire County Council (or ICC) is an upper-tier and semi-rural English local authority. It is divided into seven District Councils (DC) and collaborates with these latter, as well as nineteen other local organisations (public, private and voluntary), via the medium of its LSP. This locality was selected because it was formulating an OC project, Integrated Commissioning 2012 (IC 2012), in a tumultuous context. Furthermore, Internshire portrayed itself and was nationally perceived as ‘successful’ in its past reforms. This was a locality that had transformed itself, from one of the most politically unstable in the country in the 1980s and 1990s, to ‘four-star’ and excellent authority under New Labour’s (1997-2010) performance regime. Data were collected from three types of sources. First, semi-structured interviews with 33 key players were conducted between November 2011 and May 2013. Second, between September 2011 and April 2012, observations of participants in the organisation were compiled into field notes. Third, documents spanning forty years of organisational change from 1974 to 2013 were systematically compiled into a documentary archive.

Understanding this project and how leadership was renegotiated requires problematising their murky origins (step 1 of the logics approach). From the mid-1970s, this authority’s nascent corporate centre, spearheaded by corporate managers and later the Chief Executive’s Department (CED), mobilised shifting national and local demands (e.g. government reforms, economic recession, local political instability) as dislocatory conditions requiring change. Yet, between 1974 and 2010, similar solutions of corporate planning, performance management, centralisation and unification were proposed and accepted. This hegemonisation did not however take place without conflict. Grievances from councillors, District Councils, other partners and even County officers demanded more participation and equality. These were however successively muted via strategies of corporate training, the creation of multiple tasked groups

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

and chairs, or simply being excluded. Thus progressively, and despite changing Governments, shifting economic conditions or new organisational demands, this corporate centre became and remained hegemonic.

From 2010, events such as the financial crisis, strenuous austerity measures and new Government agendas of localism and commissioning became mobilised locally by these old grievances, challenging ‘taken-for-granted’ corporate practices of change and policy-making. The “role of the State at the local level” had been “fundamentally chang[ed]” (CED1 manager), leaving Internshire Together “wondering [...] what to do now” (DC ChiefExec1; ICC Councillors 1 and 2). A representative from a partner organisation also believed that policies such as “the localism agenda” offered organisations outside the County Council the opportunity to have “more control [...] over funding and priorities”, stressing that that dispersal would “be a benefit to the locality” (LSP Officer1). Councillors too believed that “the job [...] of a councillor now [was] changing”, becoming one of “understand[ing] different agencies” and “bringing everything together for those people out there” (ICC Councillor 2 and 3). This new context of freedom for local players to decide their “own destiny” (CED3 manager) was framed by corporate managers as creating complexities (CED4 manager), “local authorities were now left with their partners to actually think ‘what are we trying to do?’” (CED5 manager). Localism was disputed, some interviewees arguing that Districts were “in a better place than County in terms of relationship within the localities” because they were “far more local” (DC ChiefExec1).

From 2010, this corporate centre formulated a new project for the County Council and the partnership. Entitled ‘Integrated Commissioning 2012’ (IC 2012), this project framed conditions such as austerity, localism or partnership disputes as dislocations or ‘pressures’ requiring two ‘solutions’: the integration of partnerships and priorities, and the move to the vaguely defined ‘commissioning’ of services which echoed demands of collaboration, local delivery and privatisation. It was argued at the time that this project would help Internshire Together remain an excellent locality, working better in ‘hard’ rather than

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

‘soft’ partnerships and achieving ‘more with less’ resources. Partners were for instance asked to draft ‘commissioning plans’, or planning documents outlining which three or four priorities they would work towards, how they planned to achieve them and how they would collaborate with other partnerships. Although the initial principles of IC 2012 were adopted by all partners in October 2011, by the summer of 2012, the project was a failure: few plans had been accepted and voices across Internshire were claiming it was ‘business as usual’. Despite this failure however, the corporate centre, and in particular the Chief Executive, was successful in renewing its control over the organisation and the LSP. Understanding this paradox requires examining how and why leadership practices were renegotiated during this phase, mobilising the dimensions outlined *supra*.

The corporate centre had succeeded in hegemonising County leadership practices during the 1990s-2000s, particularly with the then Chief Executives (CEO 2, 1976-1991; CEO 3, 1991-1994; and CEO 4, 1994-present) linking together an increasing array of demands from officers and councillors via strategies of training and specialised groups. Similar strategies were deployed within Internshire Together. First, the corporate centre continued to widen the meaning of leadership (Dimension 1). For instance, alliances with specific individuals were built by repositioning them as ‘strategic leaders’. The *Leaders of Tomorrow programme* selected 26 managers “to ensure our future senior officers are well placed to work together in leading public service improvements”, leading to what was hailed as “a new breed of public sector manager” (CEO 4 writing in Source 16 2009, p.6). Leadership included diverse practices of collaboration, management, policy formulation in tasked groups, commissioning and waste reduction. Second, the centre reinforced the link between leadership and excellence. One particular project, Total Place, illustrates this well. Total Place included a series of pilots conducted in a dozen of English localities in 2009 to consider issues of savings, notably via the pooling of resources, and delivering better services, especially for complex issues such as social deprivation. Internshire was selected to pilot Total Place. The Chief Executive was instrumental in framing the project as also one of leadership:

“The aim is to make ours the best place in which to live and work – everything we do revolves around this ambition. However, this is no easy challenge, and requires a focus and a drive across a partnership covering city and county. There is certainly a leadership role for local government but the key is taking our partners with us. The old ways of working in the public sector have to change and we are determined to be in the forefront, showing how it can be done and how citizens and taxpayers benefit.”  
(CEO 4, quoted in Source 18 2010, p.7)

In a context where the old strategic partnership model was looking exhausted and mobilised growing criticisms locally, Total Place was here framed by the Chief Executive as a means of resuscitating the purpose of partnership working. What was proposed was a “single offer” model of drugs and alcohol misuse services, the specific project piloted (CEO 4, in Source 12 2010, p.14). In this process, leadership was mobilised as equivalent to collaboration between partners in achieving excellence, the key “ambition” of Internshire. Total Place was replacing strategic partnership working with the notion of “places” (ibid.). By extension, the corporate centre was reframing itself as a vanguardist in what was pitched as an ineluctable evolution. The Chief Executive argued that “[t]he Government [was] looking for strong leadership from local authorities to take Total Place forward. [...] Local government [...] being offered a change it must grasp” (ibid.). With Total Place, the Chief Executive was identifying ‘the’ key project for Internshire to continue excelling.

Total Place was also mobilised by the Chief Executive to renegotiate his own subject position, becoming the flagship of Internshire at the national level, ‘showcasing’ the locality’s excellence when negotiating with Government (Dimension 2):

“When it switched towards Total Place, it was on the back of trying to think that the emphasis should be on localities and outcomes. And again, [Intern]shire always trying

to be piloting nationally, always trying to be out there, trying to put influences in and given credit for that. They put a lot of time and effort into Whitehall. [...] clearly, [ex-County Leader's first name] had aspirations with the Local Government Association and also [CEO 4]. [CEO 4] wants to be seen nationally... because obviously now he's a seasoned chief exec' with a huge amount of experience." (DC ChiefExec2)

Further illustrating the militating position of the Chief Executive, in November 2009, he reported to the partnership Executive that he "detected a significant shift in thinking in Whitehall" and that Internshire's Total Place pilot was "well positioned to influence national thinking" (IT Executive 2009, p.4), another illustration of Dimension 2. Internshire could be playing an important role nationally, soon reaching its goal of influencing local issues on a national scale (e.g. ICC Councillor4). By March 2010, he was explaining in a widely-read specialised local government journal that "government had listened" to local demands such as "making greater use of pooled budgeting" (Source 12 2010, p.14). Thus, alongside the leadership positions offered to all partnership organisations, leadership also represented the particular demands of the Chief Executive, actively façonnating his position, framing projects locally, negotiating with Government, and symbolising the changing aspirations of this locality.

The IC 2012 project failed. Although several conditions can be outlined in explaining this failure (Author, 2014), this paper focuses on a particular one: the definition and practices of leadership. IC 2012's failure can be explained by the Chief Executive renegotiating his subject position as 'leader', distancing himself from IC 2012 to identify with new demands such as localism and voluntary partnership. Crucially, what was framed at the time by some corporate managers as 'the decision' of the Chief Executive not to push further the project is key in differentiating the failure of IC 2012 from that of the corporate management regime as a whole and thus in reaching a more complex understanding. Here, the Chief Executive played a key role in severing IC 2012 from the regime. Indeed, here the four dimensions, rather than being 'discovered' are iteratively constructed *in situ* to make sense of a puzzle: why did IC 2012 fail but the

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

wider corporate management discourse appeared to continue to exercise power, albeit in new forms and echoing new demands? Once again, the critical role of the researcher is important here in juggling between theory and case study so as to devise the best possible explanation (Author, 2016).

The link between the Chief Executive and the success of IC 2012 was already discussed by corporate managers during interviews in February and March 2012, one of them explaining that “if there [was] a major push” then the project would work, illustrating how this was the case for the Sports and Physical Activity commissioning plan, the exemplar commissioning project having benefited from “a particular political agenda pushing it forward” (CED6 manager). Another one explained in November 2011 that the Assistant Chief Executive “work[ed] very closely with [CEO 4]”, this latter “championing it without being involved in the detail” and “very much leading the process” (CED7 manager). He was reported by a County lead-member to be leading conversations with health (ICC Councillor1). A corporate presentation to the Corporate Management Team in October 2012 confirmed this important and multi-faceted role played by the Chief Executive, stating that “[m]ost Integrated Commissioning progress has been made where there has been strong intervention from the Chief Executive or central teams, and where external factors (money, structural change) have forced a different approach” (ICC 2012). Thus, in a first instance, the Chief Executive’s support of the project was considered by local participants as crucial in determining the success or failure of the project.

Follow-up interviews from September 2012 illustrated how the Chief Executive was slowly withdrawing his support from IC 2012, severing that link between his position and this particular project (Dimension 4). This active role of the Chief Executive in renegotiating the regime’s demands is illustrated by several examples. For instance, one corporate manager interviewed in September 2012 was particularly frustrated, explaining that he had highlighted to the “Chief Executive and others” that there was “some good progress” but stressed that the Chief Executive “could get them to do it” (CED1 manager). This manager reported that “the answer [from the Chief Executive] [had] been [...] ‘let’s not panic, this is

progress” (ibid.). This manager and others illustrated the key role played by the Chief Executive in framing this project as synonymous, or not, with himself and the locality. It also illustrated how far he was ready to go in convincing or demanding consent for this new project. A key paper was about to be presented by corporate managers to the Chief Executive, the future of the project being framed by one corporate manager as depending on whether this paper would have to be “rip[ped] up” or not following the meeting (CED2 manager). This further illustrated this individual’s influence in determining the future of this project. “[I]f the Chief Executive value[d] maintaining the day to day above converting it into a commissioning council”, another manager said he could not “do much about it” (CED1 manager).

Instead, the Chief Executive and other corporate management identities such as the Corporate Resources Department were formulating new projects of commissioning from the summer of 2012, defining new spaces of policy-making and change, addressing new demands and mobilising new strategies to redeploy their hegemony. For example, they collaborated with the Cabinet Office on the Commissioning Academy pilot which trained corporate centre-selected managers from across the County to ‘commission’. It was implementing another commissioning project directed at the procurement level of the County Council, in a “pincer movement” (CED1 manager). According to a County senior officer interviewed in May 2013, “the notion of what Integrated Commissioning was in January 2012 and now [...] ha[d] developed” with the Chief Executive’s Department formulating a “100-day commissioning plan”, circulating spreadsheets among new groups, or “workstreams”, to negotiate different understandings and practices of commissioning (ICC SeniorOfficer1).

Alongside these redefinitions of commissioning, the Chief Executive became associated with other projects of reform (Dimension 4). These illustrated the new negotiated approach to policy-making in Internshire, addressing some of the grievances of Districts and other players and previous understandings of leadership. The new negotiated attempts at change were seen as a success in collaboration across

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

Internshire Together, highlighting how the corporate centre was addressing some of the old grievances linked to the lack of equality and negotiation (CED1 and 2 managers).

As corroborated throughout the genealogy of this project, the multiplicity and diversity of practices and projects associated with this particular Chief Executive illustrated how his leadership position was constantly being renegotiated. Testimonies of local players account for this, illustrating in the 1980s and 1990s how CEO 4 deployed an organic and collaborative approach to the training of officers and councillors, but also how he became the ‘apex’ of change when important reforms such as Total Quality Management were implemented. Interviewees argued that CEO 4 did not subscribe to the idea of telling others what commissioning meant (CED1 manager), but on some occasions however, he clearly “pushed” particular items on the agenda to improve the chances of this locality being recognised nationally (DC ChiefExecs 2 and 3). Furthermore, despite drawing frontiers between this locality and its neighbours and the Government, this Chief Executive personally negotiated with these ‘enemies’ on several occasions (e.g. Multi-Area Agreement, Health and Well-Being Board). These multiple and contradictory practices of leadership, with the Chief Executive constantly redefining what his position and the organisation at large was about, illustrate the situated, multi-faceted and iterative dimensions of leadership in Internshire. Thus, although the IC 2012 project failed, the Chief Executive renegotiated his position of leader and the overarching leadership practices embodying this locality. He did so by identifying with other demands such as locality management and third sector commissioning, and thus redefining his embodiment of the organisation and by extension what this locality aspired to.

Conclusion

This paper has set out some proposals for discursively analysing and critically explaining organisational change leadership, building on political discourse theory and CMS. The discursive and logics approach is



applied throughout the paper, from the manner in which the problem is formulated (leadership as discursive practices articulated to exercise power), how it is examined (e.g. formulation of several problematisations such as what was the discourse hegemonising this organisation? How did it deal with resistance? How did it re-articulate or re-imagine itself from 2010 and build new alliance via articulating new demands in new ways?), to the leadership dimensions proposed to critically analyse the case of Internshire (how may we understand how a given OC project failed and yet an established discourse/discursive regime survived? By formulating different dimensions of leadership). Thus the paper demonstrates what a discursive approach to leadership research can look like, from theoretical framing to the articulation of empirical data and critical analysis. Nevertheless, each study will necessarily be different and specific to each researcher and their background and values, making for interesting new findings.

Building on critical leadership studies which have emphasised the political, contextual, complex and ideological dimension of leadership in organisational change, two proposals were made. It was argued that leadership should be understood as a set of changing and situated discursive practices. It was also suggested that leadership should be problematised within given sites, articulating discursive concepts of empty signifier, floating signifier, subjectivity and agency, to expose its diverse mobilisation in renewing and negotiating consent. This dynamic understanding of the articulation of leadership opens up the possibility for a situated critique of leadership practices as well as developing a discursive understanding of the role of individuals in such practices, thus elaborating on some of the comments raised in the literature (Bevir & Rhodes 2004; 2006; Fairclough 2005). By revisiting the concept of leadership in organisational studies, this paper has sought to understand how particular leadership practices constitute, transform and sometimes fail organisational change discourses. General and static definitions of leadership are unhelpful in grappling with the diversity of practices linked to leadership in a given organisation. Building on the critical literature of leadership in change and organisations at large,

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

dimensions of leadership practices were formulated retroductively and *in situ* which allowed analysing how leadership brings forth issues of ideology, politics, subjectivity and agency. With the help of Laclauian discourse theory and a logics approach, change and its leadership can be analysed as the constant mobilisation of strategies of inclusion and exclusion (political logics), drawing up of rules, values and norms (social logics) and mobilising individual fears and desires (fantasmatic logics) to hegemonise those spaces and manage grievances. This standpoint opens up the possibility of analysing organisations, change and leadership as non-necessary, dislocated and political enterprises (Cederström & Willmott 2007; Parker 2002; Parker & Dent 1996). Furthermore, this study and its dimensions have emphasised the role and subjectivity of the researcher in formulating tools to explain empirical puzzles such as why do OC projects fail.

The discursive framework proposed has added a layer of understanding to how and why change is formulated and implemented in a given organisation. Where some approaches may entertain an artificial ‘disconnect’ between theory and empirical data, this research has offered a more flowing argument, where methodology and data form part of a single, to-ing and fro-ing explanatory movement. With the four dimensions, I add to current understandings of leadership by further interrogating and reworking what leadership may represent in a given site and how ‘it’ is pragmatically articulated by organisational discourses in addressing conflict and resistance. Leadership can coincide with a multiplicity of practices. As such, one should be prepared to articulate and interrogate current theoretical categories in order to explain as fully as possible leadership in a given context. I believe that these dimensions of leadership have helped conceptualise further how change discourses gather consent and which role individuals may play in such processes, without however adopting a deterministic approach (Cederström & Willmott 2007, p.2). Particularly, the second and fourth leadership dimensions discursively address the role of individuals in dislocatory contexts, deploying concepts of empty and floating signifiers in doing so (Howarth 2013, pp.272–3). Contrary to studies framing individuals as either free and powerful agents, or

as empty shells (Badham et al. 2003; Driver 2009), a more complex understanding of individuals can be achieved.

In summary, this paper has demonstrated that leadership can be understood as a constantly changing performance of organisational power, addressing grievances by mobilising different practices under the appealing and hollowed-out demand of leadership. Furthermore, following Spicer and Alvesson's (2011) recommendations, research in leadership should avoid normatively discussing the benefits or 'dark' side of leadership (Conger 1990). Instead, as illustrated by the four leadership dimensions here devised, leadership should be analysed as a set of discursive practices and studied to make sense of the intricacies and pragmatism of power plays deployed across organisations (although this performativity should remain questioned; cf. Parker 2014). It is by articulating critical methodologies such as discourse theory, combined with a logics approach and in-depth case studies, that critical leadership studies can continue their enquiry into power in organisations.

#### Bibliography:

- Alvesson, M. & Spicer, A., 2012. Critical leadership studies: The case for critical performativity. *Human Relations*, 65(3), pp.367–390.
- Alvesson, M. & Sveningsson, S., 2003. Managers doing leadership: The extra-ordinarization of the mundane. *Human Relations*, 56(12), pp.1435–1459.
- Alvesson, M. & Sveningsson, S., 2012. Un- and re-packing leadership: context, relations, constructions, and politics. In M. Uhl-Bien & M. Ospina, eds. *Advancing Relational Leadership Research: A Dialogue Among Perspectives*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, pp. 203–225.
- Angouri, J. & Glynos, J., 2009. *Managing cultural difference and struggle in the context of the multinational corporate workplace: Solution or symptom?*, Working paper, Colchester, UK:

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

University of Essex.

Badham, R. et al., 2003. Designer deviance: Enterprise and deviance in culture change programmes. *Organization*, 10(4), pp.707–730.

Bass, B.M., 1985. *Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations*, New York, NY: Free Press.

Bevir, M., 2004. Interpretation as method, explanation, and critique: A Reply” (with R.A.W. Rhodes). *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 6.

Bevir, M. & Rhodes, R.A.W., 2006. Interpretive approaches to British government and politics. *British Politics*, 1(1), pp.84–112.

Bridgman, T. & Willmott, H., 2006. Institutions and technology: Frameworks for understanding organizational change--The case of a major ICT outsourcing contract. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 42(1), pp.110–126.

Calas, M.B. & Smircich, L., 1991. Voicing seduction to silence leadership. *Organization Studies*, 12(4), pp.567–601.

Cederstrom, C. & Spicer, A., 2013. Discourse of the real kind: A post-foundational approach to organizational discourse analysis. *Organization*, 21(2), pp.178–205.

Cederström, C. & Willmott, H., 2007. *Desiring agency*. Lund, Sweden: Lund Institute of Economic Research.

Collinson, D., 2011. Dialectics of leadership. In D. Collinson et al., eds. *Leadership*. London: Sage, pp. 27–48.

Collinson, D., 2014. Dichotomies, dialectics and dilemmas: New directions for critical leadership studies? *Leadership*, 10(1), pp.36–55.

Collinson, D., 2012. Prozac leadership and the limits of positive thinking. *Leadership*, 8(2), pp.87–107.

Collinson, D., 2006. Rethinking followership: A post-structuralist analysis of follower identities. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 17(2), pp.179–189.

- 1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60
- Conger, J., 1990. The dark side of leadership. *Organizational Dynamics*, 19(2), pp.44–45.
- Contu, A. & Willmott, H., 2005. You spin me round: The realist turn in organization and management studies. *Journal of Management Studies*, 42(8), pp.1645–1662.
- Dellagnelo, E.H.L., Böhm, S. & Mendonça, P.M.E. de, 2014. Organizing resistance movements: contribution of the political discourse theory. *Revista de Administração de Empresas*, 54(2), pp.141–153.
- Denis, J.-L., Langley, A. & Rouleau, L., 2010. The Practice of leadership in the messy world of organizations. *Leadership*, 6(1), pp.67–88.
- Driver, M., 2009. From loss to lack: Stories of organizational change as encounters with failed fantasies of self, work and organization. *Organization*, 16(3), pp.353–369.
- Driver, M., 2012. The lack of power or the power of lack in leadership as a discursively constructed identity. *Organization Studies*, 34(3), pp.407–422.
- Fairclough, N., 2005. Peripheral vision: Discourse analysis in organization studies: The case for critical realism. *Organization Studies*, 26(6), pp.915–939.
- Fairhurst, G., 2011. Discursive leadership. In A. Bryman et al., eds. *The Sage Handbook of Leadership*. London: Sage, pp. 493–505.
- Fairhurst, G., 2007. Discursive leadership: In conversation with leadership psychology. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 21(4), pp.510–521.
- Fairhurst, G.T., 2010. *The Power of Framing: Creating the Language of Leadership*, San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.
- Fairhurst, G.T. & Uhl-Bien, M., 2012. Organizational discourse analysis (ODA): Examining leadership as a relational process. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 23(6), pp.1043–1062.
- Ford, J., 2006. Discourses of leadership: Gender, identity and contradiction in a UK public sector organization. *Leadership*, 2(1), pp.77–99.

Ford, J. & Ford, L., 2012. The leadership of organization change: A view from recent empirical evidence. *Research in Organizational Change and Development*, 20, pp.1–36.

Ford, J. & Harding, N., 2007. Move over management: We are all leaders now. *Management Learning*, 38(5), pp.475–493.

Ford, J., Harding, N. & Learmonth, M., 2008. *Leadership as Identity*, Houdsmills: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gagnon, S. & Collinson, D., 2014. Rethinking global leadership development programmes: The interrelated significance of power, context and identity. *Organization Studies*, 35(5), pp.645–670.

Gemmill, G. & Oakley, J., 1992. Leadership: An alienating social myth? *Human Relations*, 45(2), pp.113–129.

Gleeson, D. & Shain, F., 2003. Managing ambiguity in further education. In M. Bennett, M. Crawford, & M. Cartwright, eds. *Effective Educational Leadership*. Buckingham: Open University Press, pp. 229–246.

Glynos, J. & Howarth, D., 2007. *Logics of Critical Explanation in Social and Political Theory*, London: Routledge.

Grint, K., 2005. *Leadership: Limits and Possibilities (Management, Work and Organisations)*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Harding, N., 2014. Reading leadership through Hegel’s master/slave dialectic: Towards a theory of the powerlessness of the powerful. *Leadership*, 10(4), pp.391–411.

Harding, N., 2005. The inception of the National Health Service: a daily managerial accomplishment. *Journal of health organization and management*, 19(3), pp.261–72.

Heracleous, L. & Barrett, M., 2001. Organizational change as discourse: Communicative actions and deep structures in the context of information technology and implementation. *Academy of Management Journal*, 44(4), pp.755–778.

Herold, D.M. et al., 2008. The effects of transformational and change leadership on employees’

- commitment to a change: A multilevel study. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 93(2), pp.346–357.
- Howarth, D., 2000. *Discourse*, Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Howarth, D., 2013. *Poststructuralism and After*, London: Palgrave.
- Howarth, D. & Griggs, S., 2006. Metaphor, catachresis and equivalence: The rhetoric of freedom to fly in the struggle over aviation policy in the United Kingdom. *Policy and Society*, 25(2), pp.23–46.
- Howarth, D., Norval, A. & Stavrakakis, Y., 2000. *Discourse Theory and Political Analysis: Identities, Hegemonies and Social Change*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- ICC, 2012. *Corporate Management Team Crisis meeting*,
- IT Executive, 2009. *Notes of a meeting*,
- Kan, M. & Parry, K., 2004. Identifying paradox: A grounded theory of leadership in overcoming resistance to change. *Leadership Quarterly*, 15(4), pp.467–491.
- Kelly, S., 2014. Towards a negative ontology of leadership. *Human Relations*, 67(8), pp.905–922.
- Knights, D. & Murray, F., 1994. *Managers Divided: Organisation Politics and Information Technology Management*, London: Wiley.
- van Knippenberg, D. & Hogg, M.A., 2003. A social identity model of leadership effectiveness in organizations. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 25, pp.243–295.
- Kotter, J., 1988. *The Leadership Factor*, New York, NY: Free Press.
- Kuipers, B. et al., 2014. The management of change in public organisations: A literature review. *Public Administration*, 92(1), pp.1–20.
- Laclau, E., 1996. *Emancipation(s)*, London: Verso.
- Laclau, E., 2006. Ideology and post-Marxism. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 11(2), pp.103–114.
- Laclau, E., 1990. *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, London: Verso.
- Laclau, E., 2005. Populism: What's in a name? In F. Panizza, ed. *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*. London: Verso, pp. 32–49.

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

Laclau, E. & Mouffe, C., 1985. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, London: Verso.

Levy, D. & Scully, M., 2007. The institutional entrepreneur as Modern Prince: The strategic face of power in contested fields. *Organization Studies*, 28(7), pp.971–991.

Levy, D.L., Szejnwald Brown, H. & de Jong, M., 2009. The contested politics of corporate governance: The case of the global reporting initiative. *Business & Society*, 49(1), pp.88–115.

Marston, A., Jones, J. & Woodward, K., 2015. Human geography without scale. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, NS 30(4), pp.416–432.

Parker, M., 2002. *Against Management: Organization in the Age of Managerialism*, Cambridge: The Polity Press.

Parker, M., 2014. ‘What is to be done?’ CMS as a political party. In V. Malin, J. Murphy, & M. Siltaoja, eds. *Getting Things Done (Dialogues in Critical Management Studies - Volume 2)*. Bradford: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, pp. 165–181.

Parker, M. & Dent, M., 1996. Managers, doctors, and culture: Changing an English Health District. *Administration & Society*, 28(3), pp.335–361.

Rodgers, C., 2006. *Informal Coalitions*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Rost, J.C., 1993. *Leadership for the Twenty-first Century*, Westport, CT: Praeger.

Schatzki, T., 2005. The sites of organizations. *Organization Studies*, 26(3), pp.465–484.

Sinclair, A., 2007. Teaching leadership critically to MBAs: Experiences from heaven and hell. *Management Learning*, 38(4), pp.458–472.

Source 12, 2010. Specialised local government press.

Source 16, 2009. Specialised municipal press.

Source 18, 2010. Regional body newsletter.

Spicer, A. & Alvesson, M., 2011. Conclusion. In M. Alvesson & A. Spicer, eds. *Metaphors we lead by:*



- 1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9 *understanding leadership in the real world*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 194–205.
- 10 Spicer, A., Alvesson, M. & Karreman, D., 2009. Critical performativity: The unfinished business of  
11 critical management studies. *Human Relations*, 62(4), pp.537–560.
- 12  
13  
14 Stavrakakis, Y., 2008. Peripheral vision: Subjectivity and the organized Other: Between symbolic  
15 authority and fantasmatic enjoyment. *Organization Studies*, 29(7), pp.1037–1059.
- 16  
17  
18 Sutherland, N., Land, C. & Bohm, S., 2014. Anti-leaders(hip) in Social Movement Organizations: The  
19 case of autonomous grassroots groups. *Organization*, 21(6), pp.759–781.
- 20  
21  
22 Tourish, D., 2014. Leadership, more or less? A processual, communication perspective on the role of  
23 agency in leadership theory. *Leadership*, 10(1), pp.79–98.
- 24  
25  
26 Tourish, D., Craig, R. & Amernic, J., 2010. Transformational leadership education and agency  
27 perspectives in business school pedagogy: A marriage of inconvenience? *British Journal of*  
28 *Management*, 21, pp.s40–s59.
- 29  
30  
31 Western, S., 2008. *Leadership: A Critical text*, London: Sage.
- 32  
33  
34 Wilson, S., 2013. *Thinking differently about leadership: A critical history of the form and formation of*  
35 *leadership studies*. Victoria University: Wellington, NZ.
- 36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60  
61  
62  
63  
64  
65  
66  
67  
68  
69  
70  
71  
72  
73  
74  
75  
76  
77  
78  
79  
80  
81  
82  
83  
84  
85  
86  
87  
88  
89  
90  
91  
92  
93  
94  
95  
96  
97  
98  
99  
100  
101  
102  
103  
104  
105  
106  
107  
108  
109  
110  
111  
112  
113  
114  
115  
116  
117  
118  
119  
120  
121  
122  
123  
124  
125  
126  
127  
128  
129  
130  
131  
132  
133  
134  
135  
136  
137  
138  
139  
140  
141  
142  
143  
144  
145  
146  
147  
148  
149  
150  
151  
152  
153  
154  
155  
156  
157  
158  
159  
160  
161  
162  
163  
164  
165  
166  
167  
168  
169  
170  
171  
172  
173  
174  
175  
176  
177  
178  
179  
180  
181  
182  
183  
184  
185  
186  
187  
188  
189  
190  
191  
192  
193  
194  
195  
196  
197  
198  
199  
200  
201  
202  
203  
204  
205  
206  
207  
208  
209  
210  
211  
212  
213  
214  
215  
216  
217  
218  
219  
220  
221  
222  
223  
224  
225  
226  
227  
228  
229  
230  
231  
232  
233  
234  
235  
236  
237  
238  
239  
240  
241  
242  
243  
244  
245  
246  
247  
248  
249  
250  
251  
252  
253  
254  
255  
256  
257  
258  
259  
260  
261  
262  
263  
264  
265  
266  
267  
268  
269  
270  
271  
272  
273  
274  
275  
276  
277  
278  
279  
280  
281  
282  
283  
284  
285  
286  
287  
288  
289  
290  
291  
292  
293  
294  
295  
296  
297  
298  
299  
300  
301  
302  
303  
304  
305  
306  
307  
308  
309  
310  
311  
312  
313  
314  
315  
316  
317  
318  
319  
320  
321  
322  
323  
324  
325  
326  
327  
328  
329  
330  
331  
332  
333  
334  
335  
336  
337  
338  
339  
340  
341  
342  
343  
344  
345  
346  
347  
348  
349  
350  
351  
352  
353  
354  
355  
356  
357  
358  
359  
360  
361  
362  
363  
364  
365  
366  
367  
368  
369  
370  
371  
372  
373  
374  
375  
376  
377  
378  
379  
380  
381  
382  
383  
384  
385  
386  
387  
388  
389  
390  
391  
392  
393  
394  
395  
396  
397  
398  
399  
400  
401  
402  
403  
404  
405  
406  
407  
408  
409  
410  
411  
412  
413  
414  
415  
416  
417  
418  
419  
420  
421  
422  
423  
424  
425  
426  
427  
428  
429  
430  
431  
432  
433  
434  
435  
436  
437  
438  
439  
440  
441  
442  
443  
444  
445  
446  
447  
448  
449  
450  
451  
452  
453  
454  
455  
456  
457  
458  
459  
460  
461  
462  
463  
464  
465  
466  
467  
468  
469  
470  
471  
472  
473  
474  
475  
476  
477  
478  
479  
480  
481  
482  
483  
484  
485  
486  
487  
488  
489  
490  
491  
492  
493  
494  
495  
496  
497  
498  
499  
500  
501  
502  
503  
504  
505  
506  
507  
508  
509  
510  
511  
512  
513  
514  
515  
516  
517  
518  
519  
520  
521  
522  
523  
524  
525  
526  
527  
528  
529  
530  
531  
532  
533  
534  
535  
536  
537  
538  
539  
540  
541  
542  
543  
544  
545  
546  
547  
548  
549  
550  
551  
552  
553  
554  
555  
556  
557  
558  
559  
560  
561  
562  
563  
564  
565  
566  
567  
568  
569  
570  
571  
572  
573  
574  
575  
576  
577  
578  
579  
580  
581  
582  
583  
584  
585  
586  
587  
588  
589  
590  
591  
592  
593  
594  
595  
596  
597  
598  
599  
600  
601  
602  
603  
604  
605  
606  
607  
608  
609  
610  
611  
612  
613  
614  
615  
616  
617  
618  
619  
620  
621  
622  
623  
624  
625  
626  
627  
628  
629  
630  
631  
632  
633  
634  
635  
636  
637  
638  
639  
640  
641  
642  
643  
644  
645  
646  
647  
648  
649  
650  
651  
652  
653  
654  
655  
656  
657  
658  
659  
660  
661  
662  
663  
664  
665  
666  
667  
668  
669  
670  
671  
672  
673  
674  
675  
676  
677  
678  
679  
680  
681  
682  
683  
684  
685  
686  
687  
688  
689  
690  
691  
692  
693  
694  
695  
696  
697  
698  
699  
700  
701  
702  
703  
704  
705  
706  
707  
708  
709  
710  
711  
712  
713  
714  
715  
716  
717  
718  
719  
720  
721  
722  
723  
724  
725  
726  
727  
728  
729  
730  
731  
732  
733  
734  
735  
736  
737  
738  
739  
740  
741  
742  
743  
744  
745  
746  
747  
748  
749  
750  
751  
752  
753  
754  
755  
756  
757  
758  
759  
760  
761  
762  
763  
764  
765  
766  
767  
768  
769  
770  
771  
772  
773  
774  
775  
776  
777  
778  
779  
780  
781  
782  
783  
784  
785  
786  
787  
788  
789  
790  
791  
792  
793  
794  
795  
796  
797  
798  
799  
800  
801  
802  
803  
804  
805  
806  
807  
808  
809  
810  
811  
812  
813  
814  
815  
816  
817  
818  
819  
820  
821  
822  
823  
824  
825  
826  
827  
828  
829  
830  
831  
832  
833  
834  
835  
836  
837  
838  
839  
840  
841  
842  
843  
844  
845  
846  
847  
848  
849  
850  
851  
852  
853  
854  
855  
856  
857  
858  
859  
860  
861  
862  
863  
864  
865  
866  
867  
868  
869  
870  
871  
872  
873  
874  
875  
876  
877  
878  
879  
880  
881  
882  
883  
884  
885  
886  
887  
888  
889  
890  
891  
892  
893  
894  
895  
896  
897  
898  
899  
900  
901  
902  
903  
904  
905  
906  
907  
908  
909  
910  
911  
912  
913  
914  
915  
916  
917  
918  
919  
920  
921  
922  
923  
924  
925  
926  
927  
928  
929  
930  
931  
932  
933  
934  
935  
936  
937  
938  
939  
940  
941  
942  
943  
944  
945  
946  
947  
948  
949  
950  
951  
952  
953  
954  
955  
956  
957  
958  
959  
960  
961  
962  
963  
964  
965  
966  
967  
968  
969  
970  
971  
972  
973  
974  
975  
976  
977  
978  
979  
980  
981  
982  
983  
984  
985  
986  
987  
988  
989  
990  
991  
992  
993  
994  
995  
996  
997  
998  
999  
1000